Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

HISTORY OF THE MOUNTAIN SCOUT PROGRAM
October 1961 - February 1962

28

The autum of 1961 saw a rapidly deteriorating security situation in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam. In-roads by Viet Cong cadre among the Montagnard population was extensive and increasing in strength.

This proto-malaysian population racially and culturally and historically opposed to the Vietnamese in many cases initially welcomed the V.C. as an alternate to their traditional Vietnamese enemies.

Numbering approximately 600,000 as against 12,000,000 Vietnamese the Montagnard inhabited 62% of the geographical area of South Vietnam. In 1954, at the departure of the French, the Montagnard represented almost the only inhabitant of the high plateau. However, by 1961 approximately 1,500,000 Vietnamese had moved into the highlands. They resided almost inclusively in the cities leaving the country-side to the nomadic Montagnard tribes, and the VC cadres who lived with them.

DOCUMENT NO. X
NO CHANGE IN CLASS.
☐ DECLASSIFIED
CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S C
NEXT REVIEW DATE:
AUTH: HR 70-2
DATE: 12/31/12 REVIEWER: 061169

VC control of the Montagnard was based on several factors. First, propaganda promising an autonomaces region for the Montagnard tribes. This particularlly appealed to the Rhade, the most politically advanced, who had revolted against the GVN in 1957. Secondly, ruthless, illegal and denigrating exploitation of the Montagnards by the Vietnamese had resulted in distrust and antipathy. Thirdly, the VC were the only people, aside from the Catholic priests, showing concern (no matter what its' motivation) for the Montagnards. Forthly, the GVN had no positive program of any immediate magnitude to attract the Montagnard.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

On the other hand, the GVN had several assets, although few were of their own making. Primarily, the VC in the final analysis increased control through terror. While their agents may have propogated the theme of autonomy, the arrival of VC troops quickly negated the good will with demands for food, labor and personnel backed by the threat of force and/or terror. This imposed a great hardship on the tribes since they raised only what sufficed for themselves. The VC could give nothing, but only take from the subsistance level of the Montagnard. Secondly, the Catholic priests had made considerable progress in converting the Montagnard. Kontum Province is a particularlly sharp example. Being anti-communist by religion and pro-GVN by politics the Catholic church formed a strong opposition to the in-roads made by the VC.

Certainly the above applied in waring degrees to the spectrum of tribes with perhaps the Koho most influenced by the VC and the primarily Catholic Bahnar the least influenced. Others; Rhade, their cousins the Jarai, Cham and so forth fall between the extremes. Nevertheless, it is possible to hazard a conclusion that the Montagnard was caught between the VC hammer and the GVN anvil.

Returning to the security situation of autumn of 1961, the province of Kontum, Pleiku, the highland areas of Quang Nam, Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh a total of 21 districts were considered ripe for complete VC control. It might be noted here that Phu Bon Province was later created out of part of Pleiku and Quang Tin from part of Quang Nam Province.

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

Indeed, the VC had captured a district headquarters in Kontum and held it for a day. Some estimates stated that Kontum had 5,000 VC troops capable of taking over the whole province including the city of Kontum and creating a capital for the V.C. Liberation Front of South Vietnam.

Be it as it may, there is little question that the situation was serious and beyond the control of the ARVN. Further, the Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps were corrupt and ineffective ciphers.

To meet the problem it was necessary to do several things. On the Vietnamese side obtain agreement, reluctant as it was, to employ and arm Montagnards. On the American side it was necessary to obtain not only CAS approval but also Country Team approval. In this case that meant General McGarr, Chief of MAAG, and the Ambassador's okay.

To obtain Vietnamese approval Captain Ngo Van Hung, head of the Montagnard Service in Hue was approached and a plan jointly discussed and agreed to was developed. It is interesting to note that the Montagnard Service and Capt. Hung suffered from the usual Vietnamese political ambidextrousness. That is, the Service was directly responsible to the President, the Minister of Interior, Col. Le Quang Tung's PSO (later Special Forces), Mr. Ngo Dinh Can the Presidents brother and "Mandarin in Residence" in Central Vietnam. Approval also had to be obtained from concerned province chiefs, the Ist Corps Commander, General Don, and II Corps Commander, General Ton That Dinh.

Few,if any, of the individuals concerned appeared to have either common interests or similar points of view. Obviously, instructions had to be forthcoming from high enough authority to gain or force the support from the various personalities. The key was Ngo Dinh Can. He

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

approved the program, wrote or spoke to the various groups and a green light glowed on the Vietnamese side.

The pill was sugared however, by personal briefings, discussions, and suggestions of all concerned. Col Tri, CO 22nd Division briefed General Dinh who obtained Presidential approval. The resulting personal relationships did much to smooth over future problems.

On the American side, Major (later Lt. Col.) Melvin Price, of MAAG Operations Section and the author rented the USOM plane and traveled to Hue. The object of this trip was to brief Major Price and gain MAAG support and ultimately country team support. Major Price and the writer briefed the Corps advisors, sector advisors, and province chiefs in both Ist and II nd Corps on the program. At the end of the trip Price and the writer wrote a summary and favorable recommendations to General McCarr. Here it might be note worthy to point up General Timmes' timely support and understanding for the concepts of a program which was essentially para military, psywar and intelligence. At any rate, the program was finally approved by General McCarr and the Ambassador. CAS approval, funds and arms were obtained by cable with in 48 hours.

Thus by 10 November, after six weeks of effort, the paper work and planning had been accomplished. We were ready to implement the plan.

The PM concept of the program was to create and employ a force of local residents fighting for local issues. The emphasis on the local concept resulted from a lack of local identification and understanding of the national ideate. Saigon to the local Montagnard was either in another world or a symbal of oppression.

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

In conversations with Col. Layton, Chief of CSD it was determined that teams of 15 men with great fire power heavily armed with Automatic weapons M3A1's plus grenades and grenade launchers could defend themselves against heavy VC attack. At the same time the relatively small size of the teams permitted great local mobility and speed of movement - an essential in counter-guerrilla warfare.

Other key advantages in using local residents were forthcoming.

Being nomadic the Montagnard had a built-in intelligence knowledge that was irreplacable. He knew the terrain, trails and most of the VC areas, indeed, in many instances he knew the VC. cadre. He was at "home" with all the intelligence that a lifetime of residence can give.

He also was known by the population. He was generally trusted by the local residents most of whom were known by name or association (family, friends, tribe). Problems, cultural, economic, social and security were the same for the commando or scout, as he later became, as with the population and importantly he had been placed in a position to do something about these problems. In essence the use of local personnel in local areas had met the requirement of guerrilla warfare of being <u>one with the people</u>. Thus, the problem of an outsider, or a nebulous ideal of national government gaining the confidence of an ethically different group was resolved.

Finally, being in his home area the logistical problem was greatly cut down. Teams could live off the country side as a matter of custom without offending the population. However, other political and psychological problems had to be overcome.

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

CONFIDENTIAL

One, the Vietnamese greatly feared an independent Montagnard force. The Rhade revolt of 1957 had made a singular impression on Vietnamese officials. Thus, it was agreed that operational control of the teams would rest with the District Chief and that the teams would operate from District Headquarters through the province chief. This also supported the need for immediate local reaction to VC activities.

Secondly, the teams must be loyal to the GVN and understand not only their role in fighting, paywar and civic action efforts but also that it was the GVN which was supporting them in their efforts to achieve a better situation in their home areas for themselves and their people.

Thus three things were done; one, all team members were recruited by District Chiefs from among those residents known to be anti-VC and loyal to the GVN. Surprisingly, many were formerly in the French Army. Secondly training was carried out by a mixed group of Vietnamese and Montagnard Officers. This was to overcome language and cultural differences and to prove the cooperation between the Vietnamese and Montagnard to the trainee. Thirdly, a heavy course of political indoctrination was given to the trainees. This of course had two results. First, it indoctrinated the soldiers and secondly, it trained him for his psywar job with his own people.

While much emphasis has been placed on the para military values of the Montagnard commando or scout program, it might be of value here to note several things. The para military effort was designed only to meet the requirement of establishing security conditions adequate to carrying out the other equally important missions of psycological warfare and civic action. The ultimate objective was to separate the Montagnard from the

CONFIDENTIAL

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

VC, thus depriving the VC of local resources. Thus, the objective was not, as many today seem to believe, to kill VC. While the teams were taught the tactics of ambush, surprise, deception etc, the essentials of anti-guerrilla warfare, they were not of a size to eradicate the VC or physically to control an area against a determined VC effort. That was the job of ARVN.

The secondary objective admitidly was to harass the VC. However, only to the point of discouraging the enemy and impressing the population with the strength of the GVN forces.

As will be noted below the phasing of the overall program included the relocation of Montagnards who deserted the VC and returned to the GVN.

Also included in the concept of the overall program was the establishment of an intelligence service capable of meeting local combat and psycological requirements. And finally the arming of loyal Montagnard villages to resist VC incursions.

The intelligence program, while supporting the teams, was concieved as a separate, if you will, compartmented operation. Teams were not to be aware of agents or the system employed.

The mission of the intelligence operation was to provide that information necessary to the success of the teams and to supplement the existing intelligence operations at District and Provincial level.

Further, the intelligence agents were to spot cadre within the hamlets and villages who could be employed as covert agit/prop assets against the VC.

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

The intelligence officers were recruited from their native districts for the same reasons as the team. Each intelligence officer was responsible for running operations, not himself, collecting information. District Chiefs were desirous of sending the IO's into VC territory to collect information. This was discouraged. The IO's recruited agents in place and mobile or traveling agents in order to provide area and target coverage. Standard trade craft was employed.

District IO's were to set up an intel center for the district chief that included maps and up to date information. Sources were given pseudonyms and were not to be revealed to the District or Province Chiefs. Name checks were run through the Hue center prior to recruitment of agents. A total of 21 IO's were trained. They inturn recruited 135 agents covering the 21 districts.

Finally in areas where the villagers were loyal and capable of being trained, or had been trained they were to be armed as "defended" or "combat" villages. 1200 Springfields 03 were given to Col. Tri of the 22nd Division for this purpose. He armed 900 veterans trained by Major Anh of his staff in December 1961 in Kontum Province.

The plan was broken down into three phases. The first from November to March and covered five provinces. The second and third phase covered a total of 17 provinces, all of the Central Highlands.

At any rate, by 10 November the go ahead signal was given to recruit the personnel for the teams and intelligence groups. They were to arrive in Hue 1 December for one months training.

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

The camp with a capacity of 500 was built in two weeks. This camp building was constructed with bamboo frames, thatched roofs, and mud walls. The walls were painted with cement when dry and whitewashed.

Arrangements were made for mess facilities, medical facilities, clothes, and all the various items necessary. Total cost: approximately $10,000.

Instructors were obtained from the Mongagnard Service, these were themselves Montagnard officers, Captains and below, and the 1st Division. The 1st Division officers were all graduates of Fort Benning and Fort Bragg.

The training program was jointly drawn up. Col. Layton of CSD went over the program and made several valuable contributions. In particular on the training with automatic weapons, ambush, defense, and etc. Emphasis of the PM training program was on deception, surprise, mobility, however, political indoctrination, psycological warfare, civic action and intelligence had equal emphasis.

The Intelligence officers were trained in separate area in the city of Hue. The course of one month covered tradecraft, target analysis, operational testing, recruitment, dead drops, live drops, safe areas, commanding and so forth as well as the administrative and reporting system employed.

In December first 350 trainees arrived and started processing. Those with malaria and other curable disease were cured, five or six were returned to their district and replacement sent to Hue.

The training schedule was planned a tightly as possible. Every hour was filled. This was necessary to keep morale high. Food was excellent and vitamins were provided for all to build physical resistance.

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

On January 1, 1962 the training was completed. Trainees were returned to their districts to begin operations.

A point should be noted here. Radio operators had been a serious shortage. Since each DIO was to be linked with Hue and Provincial Headquarters by radio some 25 Radio Operators had to be trained and given radios. This was done by Captain Duong, one of President Diem's personal radio officers in Saigon. Training was accomplished in Saigon. RS-5's and RS-6's were provided.

The teams began operations in the first week of January with the exception of Binh Dinh Province where the province chief capriciously gave them 10 days leave. It developed that in VC controlled areas the VC did not permit some 10 team members to return and thus they were lost to the operation and had to be replaced.

In late January 700,000 piasters of civic action materials were distributed by the teams as part of their psycological warfare effort. Contact was made with various Montagnard villages requesting they come into the government controlled areas for resettlement.

By February 1962 assessment was possible. The intelligence side appeared to be gaining well. Recruitment of such agents had progressed almost to the point of the 135 programmed.

However, radio communications were still a problem. Radio operators were still scarce and lack of experience with the RS-5 and 6 resulted in unsatisfactory use of those sets. As an emergency measure the ARVN ANGR-9's system was employed.

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460

CONFIDENTIAL

AL: Also in February a captured VC document in Kontum Province stated that VC were not to go into villages since villagers were armed and would kill them. Further ARVN 22nd Division G-2 indicated VC strength had fallen in Kontum to less than 500.

Ralph Johnson

CONFIDENTIAL

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05657460